

George Wakeford BEM 1900-1985

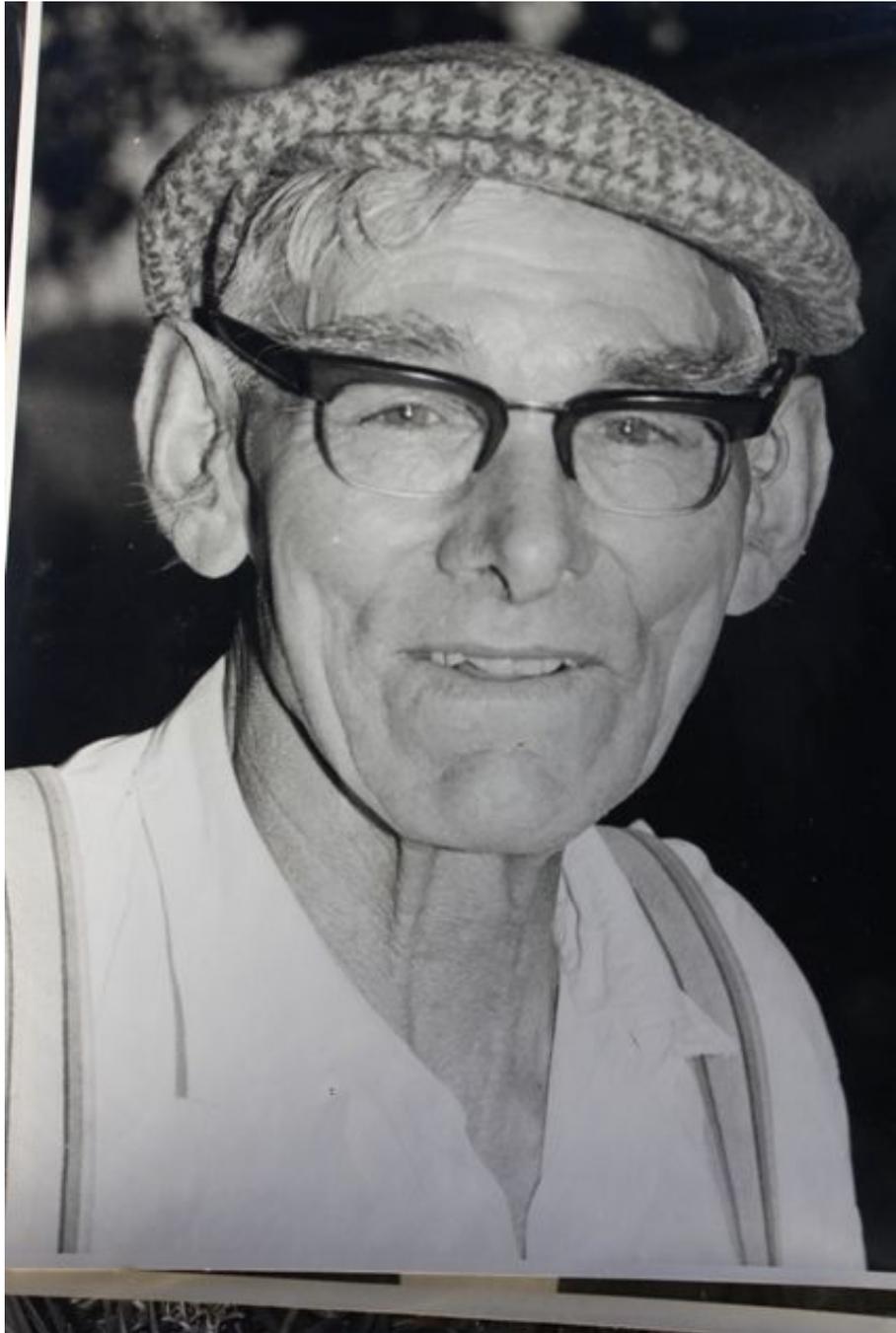


Figure 1. George Wakeford looking very much as I remember him.

Edward Henry George Wakeford, always known as George, was very influential in the formation and development of the Wisborough Green Beekeepers Association (WGBKA) for the first 30 years of our existence. He very quietly made a great contribution to beekeeping in the Wisborough Green area. In recognition of that contribution I am writing these words, as I am probably the last person alive who knew him well enough, certainly as far as beekeeping goes, to ensure that a great Sussex character who was well known, albeit only locally, is not forgotten with the passing of time. I include some of my own

memories of him that I hope will show what a kind, generous, helpful and inspiring man he was. Unlike modern people, his vast knowledge of the countryside and skill in doing the many tasks needed was gained by using his hands, eyes and common sense, not by reading books, attending courses or looking on a screen. He was from an earlier age without these facilities or those we now take for granted. His like will probably never be seen again.

He was best known as a beekeeper, though he was very knowledgeable about many other aspects of country life. There wasn't much to do with the land he couldn't turn his hand to. Although intended as a permanent feature for the WGBKA website I will not confine this to beekeeping, because there was so much more to George that I hope I can show the reader what a tremendously gifted, though humble character he was.

One of three brothers, George was born at Palfrey Farm, Petworth, Sussex, on 7th January 1900. His family were tenant farmers, but although George considered his father to be a good farmer, farming provided a meagre income, especially as the land at Palfrey was poor. In those days farming families survived because they knew how to live cheaply off the land, by developing many skills. His father died when George was 18 years old. The farm could not support his mother and three sons, so when he was 25 years old George took up timber cutting, earning £2 10s in his first week.

Although George's father was a skeppist beekeeper, George didn't take up beekeeping until he was in his teens, when he acquired a colony of bees in a skep in return for a gold half sovereign, the accepted price then. At about this time there was the mass progression from skeps to moveable frame hives, the Isle of Wight epidemic and the Great War, all of which were great influences on beekeeping in the first quarter of the 20th century. George was progressive and quickly changed to moveable frame hives that were known, perhaps dismissively, as "box hives" by the older beekeepers and soon had a dozen or so colonies. He had his first honey extractor as a 21st birthday present from his mother.

Skeppists didn't know much about bees, other than what they gleaned by observing external signs, so George had to learn from what books he had available and from his own observations. He admitted he was in a muddle until the postman helped him. He joined the Sussex BKA and attended demonstrations when he could.

With timber cutting work often some distance away from home and transport being difficult, George was often away for some time, but he still managed to look after his bees when he could.

In what little spare time he had George started looking after bees for other people on their premises. This picked up well and the timber cutting reduced, so he became a full time beekeeper, making up with gardening and other odd job work during slack times.

I started keeping bees in June 1963 and within a very short time I met George, who was then the Secretary of WGBKA. I was still at school and keen to learn. I helped George at weekends and school holidays and as I have been involved in the land all my life we had a lot in common. Through being practical I could often see his next move and wasn't frightened of work, which I think helped him rather than being a hindrance, so we worked very well together. Initially I was the "smoker boy" and it wasn't until later that I realised how much I had learnt about keeping a colony under control by watching a great handler of bees and hearing the gentle words of "a little more smoke boy".

George was one of the founder members of WGBKA in 1947, being a Division of Sussex BKA, later a Division of West Sussex BKA. Although he was a very quiet man, his practical beekeeping ability stood him way above others. He gained a great deal of respect, possibly the main reason for WGBKA being the largest Sussex BKA Division for many years. He soon became the secretary, a post he retained until the 1970s. George's administrative skills were not that great, but he retained the position when there were others who were much better suited. Although he offered to step aside on several occasions nobody wanted to upset him, so there he stayed.

The first WGBKA Chairman held the post for 24 years, dying in office in late 1970. George suggested I replaced them, this at the age of 23! I felt there was a lot to be done and set about it in an enthusiastic manner. The President at the time had indicated they wished to step down and we had a newish member who I thought would make a good secretary. This provided the opportunity to elect George to a position that was far more suited and avoided him struggling in a position he was always uncomfortable with. It was typical of George's sense of fairness that after a few years he offered to stand down as President to let someone else have a go. There was nobody more deserving than him, so to avoid any more offers to stand down we elected him Life President, that reflected the level of respect he had.

Because of his background, George was good at many things you would expect a genuine country person to do. He was good with animals, gardening, hedging, ditching, coppicing, etc and was often asked to do the odd job to help someone out. He had a few people, including me, he called upon to help with the big jobs he couldn't manage on his own. George didn't like machinery very much, so he persuaded me to buy a chainsaw to do some of the work. For several winters running we cut down oak tillers to thin out woodland at Barkfold Manor, Kirdford and cut them up for firewood. In the early 1970s we pollarded a large lime tree in the Mothers Garden in Billingshurst. They had a quote for £47.10s, but as a charity they couldn't afford it, so George did it for £10. It took us 2 days to do the job and burn the branches! Although over 70 years old he insisted on climbing the tree to cut the

branches instead of me doing it, all by hand and with no safety equipment as would be used today. It worked the other way as well. One winter I bought 2 acres of standing chestnut coppice from which we cut, split and pointed over 2,000 fence posts - all by hand! These are skills that have almost disappeared.

During George's time as a beekeeper he didn't have many of the problems the modern beekeeper has. Beekeeping was very much easier, with many being what were termed "let alone beekeepers", putting supers on in April and taking them off in August to extract the honey. This was before the widespread introduction of oil seed rape, whose rapid granulation requires an early extraction, in addition to the traditional later one for the main crop.

George wasn't very knowledgeable about what was happening inside a colony of bees. He knew the basics and what the bees would do in response to his actions and when, but not always why. He certainly knew enough to manage colonies but that was about it, however, he was the best handler of bees I have ever seen by some considerable distance. I never saw him wear gloves or a veil, his only tools being an old fashioned straight nosed smoker and hive tool, yet he could handle quite spiteful colonies that others with more equipment and protective kit would run away from. I am convinced that because he wore no protective clothing (as did a lot of beekeepers in my earlier years) there was no barrier between him and the bees. This allowed him to effectively become part of the colony, hence his gentle and thoughtful handling that made it appear to some that he was "taming" them. Although not in a soppy way he respected bees and called them "they little people", though the more aggressive were called "they little jiggers"! Through experience and commonsense he knew just when to give bees a puff of smoke and how much.

Although I spent a lot of time with George and learnt a tremendous amount, he never actually taught me very much, because he wasn't a great teacher. He really did see what he was doing as ordinary, assumed it was obvious and that others knew it. I have always been observant, so understood much of what he was doing, even though he didn't always tell me. It was a real joy to watch him handle bees. I learnt so much by doing so and asking appropriate questions to tease the information from him.

In stating the above I am not being disrespectful, but we must understand the times in which George lived and his background. In those days children weren't protected in the way modern children are, so were exposed to what the adults were doing and the danger of accidents. Almost as soon as he could walk George was probably involved with the farm in some way, so he was learning from a very early age, probably without instruction, but by copying others. Schooling was about the "three r's" and preparing children for their working lives, not for university as now. George always told me that he left school at the age of 14,

but the school leaving age wasn't increased from 13 to 14 until 1918. He was actually a very intelligent man and I believe that with the benefit of modern education he would have done very well.

He didn't know much about the theoretical side of beekeeping, very few of the working classes did. Without the problems the modern beekeeper has they could get reasonable crops without knowing. We must not forget that many beekeepers at that time worked on the land in some way, probably 6 or more days a week, with a working day being longer than it is now. Throughout his life George was busy working or gardening, with far less leisure time than we have today, so he had little free time to keep abreast of the many beekeeping developments that were made during his lifetime, such as the discovery of pheromones, which has explained a lot about the behaviour of bees that was probably previously considered in human terms.

His basic schooling didn't help him teach in a formal manner. Learning about life and work for country folk was about watching others and being shown "on the job", together with learning from mistakes, so George assumed the same in others. If you are good at what you are doing, as he was, you can teach effectively without verbal instruction if the recipient is capable of learning.



Figure 2. George Wakeford preparing to inspect a colony in a WBC hive. The sloping roof tells me this hive was probably made by C.T. Overton and Sons (Est 1883) of Crawley, as it was typical of their design. Overton lifts were oblong, not square as per the British Standard. I have no idea why the top lift with the porch is upside down. This is how George handled a colony of bees with no protection. Note the straight nosed smoker. There may well be queen cells or a queen in his cap!

I started beekeeping in the June following the hard 1962/63 winter, when many colonies perished. To make up for heavy losses, that I was told were around 80%, many of the surviving colonies were split and given cheap imported queens, mainly Italians (*Apis mellifera ligustica*), which George also did for his customers. They were very gentle to handle, but the daughters and granddaughters could be rather unpleasant, a condition that is now termed "F2 aggression". On several occasions he commented that bees were more aggressive than they used to be, but after several years they returned to being good tempered, presumably because of gene dilution.

George was so kind that if another beekeeper had a problem with an aggressive colony, he replaced a queen that headed a bad tempered colony with one of his own queens, then put the bad queen in his own hive. This meant that some of his own bees were more defensive than I would tolerate today. I saw him handle some very unpleasant bees, but I only remember him giving up on one occasion because they were too difficult to handle. This was when we only managed to get through about half the 6-8 colonies of his own at Ebernoe, before quickly closing them down and scaling a barbed wire fence to escape! George knew the Italian bees were not suited to our conditions and often said that beekeepers should have raised queens from the surviving stock instead of using imports. For an evening meeting, Wisborough Green and Horsham BKA (now Central Sussex) each put up two people for a question and answer panel. Someone asked what the panel thought of Italian bees. After the others had their say George replied with something like "They are lazy and don't work when it is cool. Just like the Italians during the war, who ran away when things got tough"! Following an outburst of laughter one of the Horsham members jumped to her feet and said her father was Italian! George was a very polite man and wouldn't deliberately offend anyone, but at that time people were far less sensitive than they are now.

I never saw George raise queens in a managed way, which I always thought was a pity, as he had access to a large number of colonies to select and raise queens from. I'm sure that if he raised queens using one of the artificial methods it would have made his work easier. In those days very few beekeepers raised queens, so I guess he never thought about it. To produce queens to make increase once colony numbers had recovered and beekeeping had returned to normality, he used swarm cells, or if none were available, he would simply split a colony and let the queenless half raise queens from emergency cells, in a similar manner to what the Americans call a "walkaway split". In those days there weren't the problems with queens that modern beekeepers have and it was very rare for a queen cell not to result in a laying queen. Although there was little attempt to use queen cells from the better colonies to improve the quality of stock, I never remember young queens failing,

disappearing or being superseded as we have seen since about 2000. Many lived to 5 years or more.

Modern beekeepers would ridicule his use of the small old fashioned straight nosed smoker, saying they burn out too quickly, which is probably why they are no longer produced, but George knew how to use them. On many occasions I have spent a day with him where he only lit the smoker in the morning, a tightly rolled charge of corrugated cardboard lasting an hour or more. For queen cages he used cardboard matchboxes, putting the queen in with about 4 workers. He left it slightly ajar so the bees could chew it and release the queen themselves.

At one stage I reckoned that George looked after over 400 colonies for more than 100 customers. They owned varying numbers from one to 30 or more, the latter being for pollination on some of the many fruit farms we had in the area at the time. Some customers wanted full management, others "as and when". With that number of colonies spread over a wide area of 15 or more miles radius of Wisborough Green it was impossible to manage them efficiently, so it was largely what might be referred to as "reactive management". Summer days were largely spent dealing with colonies after they swarmed, not before. George's wife, who was frightened of bees, would take telephone calls from customers to say their bees had swarmed. In the morning he would deal with the previous afternoon's calls, then wherever he was George would drive home for 1 o'clock lunch. In the afternoon he dealt with the calls that came in during the morning, even though he may have just driven past the bees 5-10 miles away! A mobile phone would have been handy!

If a swarm had departed before he got there he would deal with the swarmed colony and any others. George used a very simple swarm control technique that in general I have used all my beekeeping life. It doesn't need extra kit or result in extra colonies as most of the other methods do. Although little used now, it was well used in past times. I have named it the "Wakeford Method", as although it wasn't his idea it was George who taught it to me, and I feel it needs some identification. If a colony is building swarm cells he would clip the queen, remove all the charged queen cells and add a super. He returned 7 days later. If there were no queen cells he had solved the problem. If there were queen cells he removed the queen and any sealed queen cells. 7 days later he removed all queen cells bar one, let that queen emerge, get mated and take over the colony. It is simple and it works, without some of the fancy manipulations or kit that other methods have.

Days spent beekeeping with George were always fun, as he had a great sense of humour and many tales to tell, if sometimes rather repetitively. As is often the case with country people these were usually at the expense of someone who might be seen as being in a position of authority, such as the vicar, schoolteacher, solicitor, doctor or policeman.

Because many of the colonies he dealt with had lost a swarm there was usually an abundance of sealed queen cells, some of which were on the point of emerging. He would put some of them he found early in the day into his cap to keep them warm in case they were needed later. Very often several would emerge, though I can't ever remember any virgin queens fighting. Occasionally he put fertile queens he took away from colonies in his cap, but they didn't usually live long without feeding. Forty years later I still come across people, usually non-beekeepers, who tell me that George Wakeford kept queen bees in his cap. Such was his reputation that some of those people didn't know him, some coming into the area after George died.

When I first joined Wisborough Green we only had a few meetings a year. The only winter meeting was the AGM, usually with an outside speaker. There were about 3-4 monthly summer meetings at different members apiaries, always with George demonstrating. Because he was a very quiet man and assumed others knew what he was doing, he hardly said anything during demonstrations, consequently nobody learnt very much. It was made more difficult because there were often 30-40 in attendance. Not all could get round a hive, so many didn't see what was happening anyway. The Treasurer, Tom Haffenden, who worked with George quite a bit, was usually quite close and I was the smoker boy, so that took up some of the space. I suspect that many only came for a natter, tea and cake. Some of the host's colonies had little attention and on more than one occasion I remember having to cut the vegetation away from hives so we could open them! Many of the situations would be frowned upon by some beekeepers today, but even though bees weren't always kept in the best of conditions and often with minimal management, most beekeepers got a reasonable crop of honey. This was before oil seed rape, when you did well to average 30lb per hive in the Wisborough Green area, that was only middling for forage. George always said that in those days Wisborough Green was poor for honey, but better a mile in any direction.

As a youngster I wanted to know more and felt others did too. I said to George that it might be useful if members saw the progress of colonies through the summer. "What do you mean, boy?" was his response, so I said that I felt that we would learn more if we visited the same member each time, or perhaps find somewhere to have some colonies for the association where we could have our meetings. George didn't say much more at the time, but after a couple of weeks he said something like "That idea you had for an association apiary, boy. I've found somewhere". He had spoken to Mr Peter Mursell (later Sir Peter Mursell), the owner of Dounhurst Fruit Farm, who agreed that we could place an apiary there in return for the bees pollinating the fruit trees. For various reasons the bees have been on three different sites within Dounhurst since the mid 1960s, so over 50 years on the

same farm. It was later named "The George Wakeford Memorial Apiary" in recognition of George's huge contribution to the association. George was awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) for his services to beekeeping, an honour that was well deserved.

Because he was still well known amongst local timber cutters, George would be told about bees in trees that were to be felled or already had been. The usual method to remove them was to cut the tree trunk above and below the nest, then split with timber wedges, remove the combs, cut them up and tie into frames. These were put into a brood box where they established a nest. Timber cutters usually did their work when there are no leaves on the trees, so most colonies were removed during the winter. I helped George with many of these and it may have been part of the reason he persuaded me to buy a chainsaw!



Figure 3. This tree was split with timber wedges and the bees removed by George and myself at Brinsbury as a demonstration to some visiting Australian beekeepers. That is George's arm.

Most years we removed bees from around 12-15 trees. George was occasionally asked to remove bees from buildings, which was often during the summer, often soon after the swarms had taken up residence. This was usually more time consuming, taking time that could be better spent elsewhere. A short film clip survives on Youtube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F15ZZudzhTM> of George removing bees from a Sussex

barn at Lower Broadbridge Farm, Broadbridge Heath. The owner had bees that George looked after. I was not involved with removing this one, but I helped with many others in similar situations.



Figure 4. George Wakeford removing a colony from behind the tile hung wall of "The Old Post Office" in Ewhurst, Surrey.

George was a very kind man and I never heard him say a bad word about anyone. He avoided the politics that unfortunately has always caused problems in beekeeping. He didn't like confrontation and preferred to agree with someone than disagree, even though he may have been right.

He was a good and productive gardener, always having something in reserve if one crop failed. Rarely would any visitor go away from his home without taking some fruit or vegetables with them. He was knowledgeable about apples and grew uncommon varieties such as Gladstone, Royal Jubilee, Adams Pearmain, Sheepshead and Ecklinville Seedling. He had another variety that he bought as Blenheim Orange but wasn't. Someone told him it was Ben's Red, but it wasn't that either. Unlike most other varieties it could be struck from cuttings, which he distributed widely. Each year we travelled by coach to the National Honey Show that at that time was held in Caxton Hall, Westminster. George always brought a box of these unknown apples for us to eat in the coach on the way home. Many of his apple trees had mistletoe growing in them that he had propagated himself.

Although he was the best known beekeeper in West Sussex, he rarely travelled outside the county, so was almost unknown elsewhere. This was a great pity, as others could have seen a real master handling bees. On one occasion he split a tree with bees in at an event in Berkshire, but I couldn't be with him as I was playing cricket that day.

Beeswax from cappings was a useful perk, so at the end of the season George accumulated quite a large amount that was rendered down and exchanged for supplies at appliance dealers Robert Lee of Uxbridge. He was dissatisfied with the efficiency of the wax extractors then available, so with guidance from another beekeeper he designed one with a different concept. It was basically an oblong metal box with a sloping tray to place the wax on, with a tank below to take water. The extractor was placed on a heat source, the steam generated was diffused through a channel with holes in it that was fixed to the underside of the removable lid. The molten wax ran out of a spout. George acquired a patent for it as "The Wakeford Wax Extractor". It was very efficient and perhaps with slight modifications would still be in production today, but unfortunately George wasn't a businessman, so had no idea how to advertise and market it. The only advert I remember was for a short time in the classified column of the BeeCraft magazine that was simply "Wakeford Wax Extractor. £4.10s post paid", with no description. In writing this I looked online to see if I could glean any patent information about the Wakeford Wax Extractor. I found it was British patent 915916-A, application date Dec 13th 1960, publication date Jan 16th 1963. There are drawings that show the original idea that I never saw, with further drawings of an improvement, which I did see, but no drawings of the last version that was the production model. In addition, there was a Canadian Patent CA686116A, with the application granted 1964-05-12. I never knew about this and George never told me. I have not been able to find patents information for any other country, so why Canada? Was it an enthusiastic patent agent? Sadly, for such a useful piece of kit there were only a couple of dozen sold, mainly the result of poor marketing and pricing. George told me that he paid the patent agent around £400 and the extractors cost £4 each to make, so there was a hefty loss.

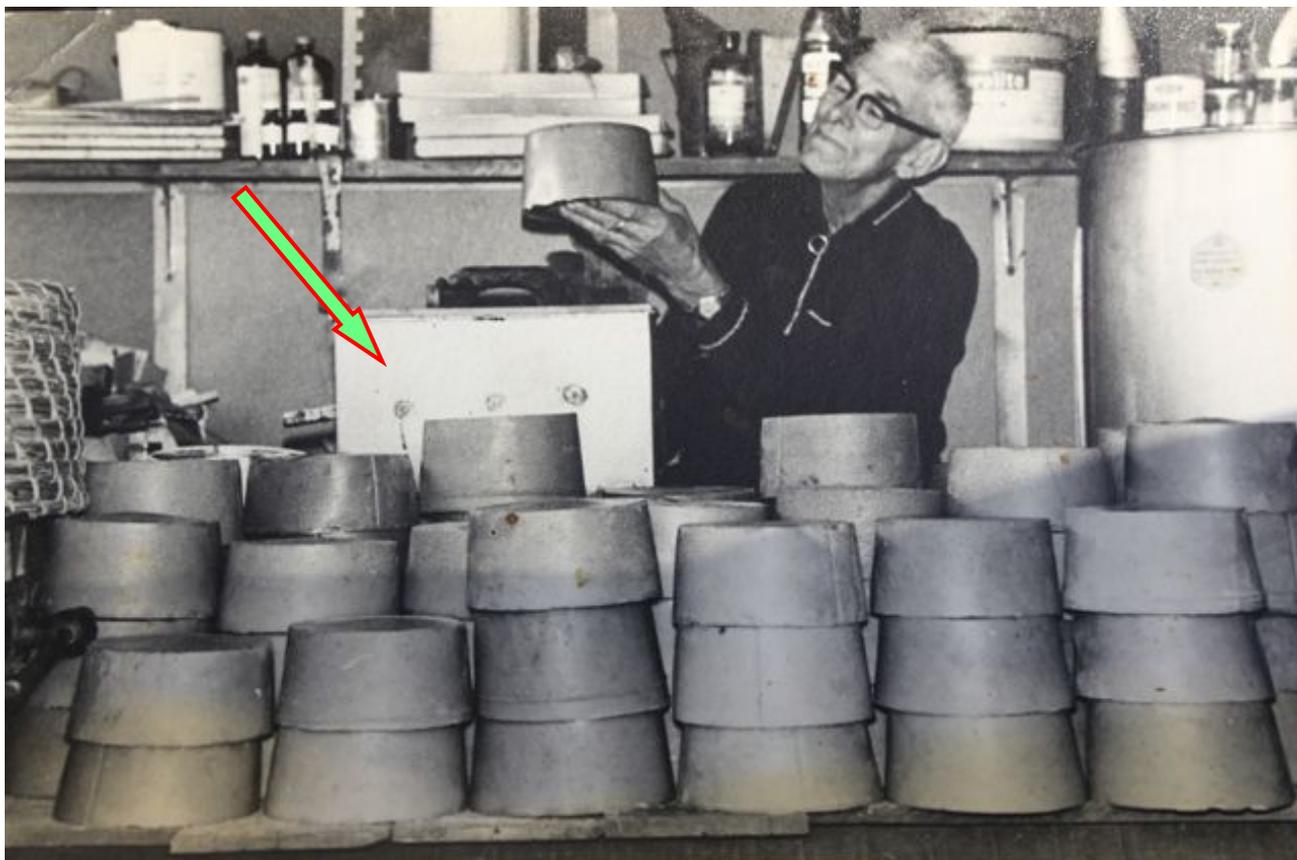


Figure 5. George Wakeford with a crop of beeswax rendered from cappings. Note the Wakeford Wax Extractor (arrowed) in the centre. I believe this to be the second prototype, not the final version. He ran the molten wax (from the spout seen on the left) into tapered tins (one just seen under the spout) obtained from the butcher that had previously contained lamb's liver from New Zealand. This photograph was probably taken in the shed of Tom Haffenden, who worked closely with George and at one stage was the WGBKA Treasurer.

George used very simple colony management techniques. Much of what I learnt from him is the basis of the methods I still use today, perhaps with a little modification. These are the methods I pass on to others, not only at Wisborough Green BKA meetings, but elsewhere too. This includes putting the smoker between your knees, so if you need it in a hurry, as you sometimes do when a colony gets fired up, it is handy and you don't lose valuable seconds fetching it from wherever you stood it. Such a simple thing to do, but I rarely see beekeepers elsewhere doing it.

I helped George remove supers off many hundreds of colonies for extracting. Never did he use a clearer board, it was always smoke and shake at which he was very quick. This was mainly so he could remove the supers, extract the honey and return the supers in one trip. Some of the ramshackle hives he had to deal with, that were mainly WBC or "Cottage" hives, were often ill-fitting. Canvas quilts were used before wooden crown boards became

common. There were often so many gaps and holes that it was difficult to block them all up, allowing bees and wasps to access the supers above the clearer board and rob them out. British Standard 1300 for beehives was introduced in 1946. Before that manufacturers worked to their own design and sizes, that were often incompatible with those of others, therefore when parts were acquired, usually secondhand and from several sources, there would often be gaps that would leak bees or be propolised up.

It must be remembered this was shortly after a long war when people still had the "make do and mend" mentality. During the war and for some time afterwards a permit was required to purchase timber. There were shortages anyway, so hives, even those commercially made, were often made from several bits, or were homemade from whatever wood was available, often by people with fairly low carpentry skills.

George had a straight back Ford Prefect car. He carried larger items, including hives and extracting equipment, on the back by lowering the boot lid and resting them on that, usually being secured by string or rope to the door handles either side!

Extracting was usually done at the customers premises, often not bee proof. These places varied from kitchens to sheds. I have extracted honey in such places as chicken sheds, Nissen huts and farm buildings with dust and a bit more on the floor! George's honey extractor was a 4 frame manual tangential machine where the combs could change direction by reversing the handle. I haven't seen another like it. Uncapping was into a converted honey extractor with a wire gauze basket. The honey was spun out of the wax quickly and efficiently without draining or melting, leaving the cappings quite dry.

I never saw George use honey tins or buckets for storing honey. It was always bottled straight away from the bottling tank after being strained through butter muslin. This left scum on top of the jars, but nobody bothered much about presentation in those days.



Figure 6. George Wakeford smoking and shaking bees from a super for extraction. Note the smoker between his knees, where it was readily available if needed.

Like many country characters George often had a bit of mischief in him and was a practical joker, always being cheerful, with never a complaint. I have many amusing tales about him, which includes his driving ability. How his car stayed on the road when he was often looking elsewhere had more to do with luck than anything else. He stopped driving when he backed out into the road and was hit by a vehicle towing a trailer load of pigs. I understand there was a deal struck with the local policeman that resulted in George surrendering his licence.

He looked after bees for Mrs Poste who lived at Little Wassell on the edge of Ebernoe common. George always called her Mrs. Poste and she called him Mr. Wakeford. One day after leaving her house, George said "Mrs. Poste and I are related in some way, boy". I asked how and he replied, "Her mother and mine were sisters", making them cousins. I didn't enquire further because I could have unearthed some unwanted family history.

"Beemaster" is the title of a little book, published in 1977, about George Wakeford that was ghost written from tape recordings that George made. George was smart enough to know there were few left of his generation with a story to tell, so he was keen there should be a permanent record. The idea was good, but quite frankly I thought the book was very poorly written and produced, not doing justice to such a great man. George made the recordings with little order or structure and the writer, who had written several books herself, simply wrote what he said. It was later much improved by WGBKA member Geoff Lawes and published in 2012 as "Bee-Master Revisited". Geoff did a lot of further research, with contributions from George's daughter Josie Curtis and me. He has cleverly retained all of the original with additions and explanations in distinctive font. It is now a very readable account of the life of a grand old Sussex beekeeper who had a huge knowledge of the countryside and its workings. I thoroughly recommend it.

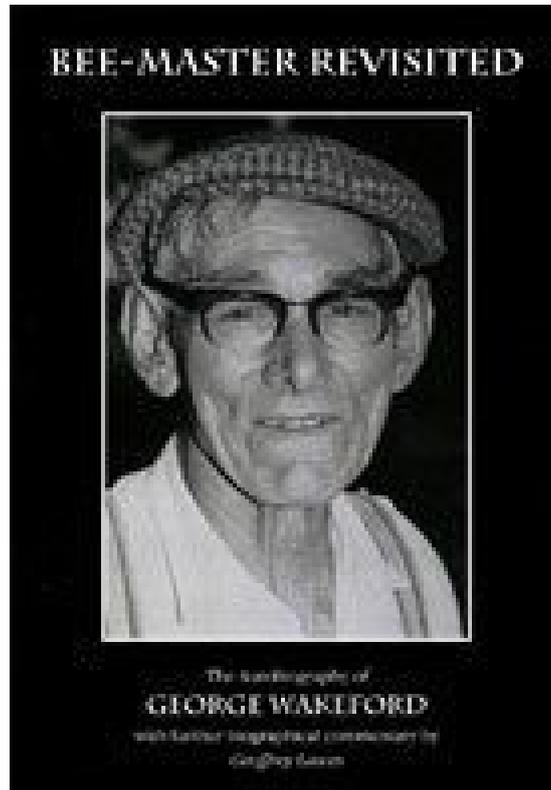


Figure 7. The cover of "Bee-master Revisited". With kind permission from Northern Bee Books.

I was incredibly lucky to have known George Wakeford and the Wisborough Green BKA were lucky to have had him as a member. He was very helpful and generous and always had time for everyone. Only rarely did I see him show anger or raise his voice, although I witnessed many occasions when I felt he had a right to do so, like the time at Hawkhurst Court School where he took a swarm in a skep. By bumping the skep on the ground, turning it round and repeating, George looked for the queen to clip her wing, so she couldn't fly and take off with the bees from the hive he put them into. Instead of finding the expected fertile queen we found a virgin, then another, and another and so on. In total we removed 19 virgin queens from that swarm and they still took off, so there were more we didn't find. This is the only time I have found more than half a dozen virgin queens in a swarm. He rarely used christian names, even to people he knew well and were a lot younger than him. He often forgot their names, so everyone was "Mr, Mrs or Miss er - um"! Like a lot of men, I was always called "boy". George was probably the last person I remember to use a few words of Sussex dialect, probably because of his upbringing on an isolated farm where much of his contact would have been with others who spoke like him. He spoke with a gentle Sussex accent, something that sadly is fast disappearing. In conversation he would use phrases like "none too many". Instead of "yours" it was "yourn". "Little was pronounced "liddle" and "meadow"

was “medder”. “Average” was “middlin”. “Billingshurst” was “Binsurst”, “Petworth” was “Petterth”, “Pulborough” was “Poboro” and “Fittleworth” was “Fittlerth”, although I never heard him use the local saying of “Where’s Fittlerth? – arfway tween Petterth and Poboro!”. Like all locals “Kirdford” was “Kird – ford”, not “Kerd-ferd”, “Easebourne” was “Esburn”, not “Ease-bourne” and “Bedham” was “Bed-ham”, not “Beddam” as the wave of incomers call them. Anyone who was dead had gone to Eartham! These words have all been underlined by the spell checker, but 50 odd years ago that's how us Sussex folk spoke whether you likes it or not!

George Garland was a Sussex man who became a professional photographer specialising in rural life and the characters in the Petworth area. Approaching 70,000 of his photographs are deposited in the County Record Office. There are some that although may not be indicated are clearly of George Wakeford, showing that his skills were also appreciated by non-beekeepers.



Figure 8. This photograph of a swarm being taken from a currant bush in Wisborough Green was taken by George Garland in 1934. Although not named, it is almost certainly George Wakeford.

George had a rubber stamp that he used on such things as his honey labels and invoices. The wording was "From the apiaries of G. Wakeford Bee-Master Wisborough Green, Sussex". "Bee-Master" was also used for his listing in the telephone directory. This is an old term meaning master of the bees. He certainly was that and with far greater ability than I have ever seen from anyone else. It was a description of what he did in the same way as a plumber or carpenter did, not for self publicity.



Figure 9. George Wakeford's rubber stamp he used for honey labels, etc. Note there is no telephone number.

I originally intended writing a short article so that one of our founders and influential members wasn't forgotten. George Wakeford, although a humble countryman, with the ability to handle bees far better than anyone I have ever seen, has demanded much more space than I expected, but I am delighted to give it to him. There are many kind words to describe him and I have sprinkled a few about this article. For those born in later times, or have come into the countryside recently, it is probably difficult to understand how characters like George were made, but made they were.

Artists painted idyllic rural scenes that portrayed a lazy and slow lifestyle, but the reality was very different. Until very recently country people have always had it hard, working long hours with little financial reward, often in very unpleasant conditions. They were highly skilled at many tasks, not specialised, mechanised or controlled by computers as their modern counterparts are.

If George was born 80-100 years later he would have had a much different life. In order to have performed much of what came naturally to him he would have needed risk assessments, training, certificates and a CV today. George knew what he was doing, so he didn't need these.

When I first knew him George's short-term memory was poor and his hands shook, both getting worse as time went on. I have some amusing tales connected with these, but I think

it respectful to keep them to myself. Modern treatment might have improved these conditions that may have developed into Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases, from which he suffered in the latter stages of his life. It was the sad and undeserving ending of a man that made such a great contribution to beekeeping in the Wisborough Green area and did it in a cheery manner.

In writing this I may be accused of including too much about myself. I can understand that, as it should be about George Wakeford, not me. I spent a lot of my time with him, not only beekeeping, but doing other things as well, consequently I knew and understood him very well. When doing something together we worked as a team, as we both knew what each other was doing, so knew the next step. He was brilliant to work with.

George Wakeford had a huge influence on my life in many ways, for which I will always be grateful. He did many good things for many people, some of which I can bring to the reader's attention with a few anecdotes. He did them unselfishly, without making a noise and without seeking reward. Apart from the previously mentioned books he might have otherwise been quickly forgotten. Although he was in a position to do so, he never remotely thought of trying to make a name for himself, as others with far less ability might have done. He had no need to do so.

I would not have been able to convey what a kind, likeable, thoughtful, generous, encouraging and capable man he was without giving a few examples that I know about. George Wakeford taught me a lot about many things, especially beekeeping. I am simply the link that passes them on.

The photographs have come from a variety of sources, some being copied, possibly more than once. It is not easy to tell who some of the original photographers were. I know that three are mine, but it would be unreasonable to credit some, not others, however, the photo by George Garland has made a point about a non-beekeeper, so I have credited him.

Roger Patterson.

Life President. Wisborough Green Beekeepers Association. August 28th 2019.